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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, October 7, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "FALL FIRE HAZARDS." Information from the Bureaus of Chemistry and Soils, Agricultural Engineering, and Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture.

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People should think about fire danger fifty-two weeks of the year, as well as during Fire Prevention Week, October 4 to 10, in the opinion of Dr. David J. Price, Fire Prevention Engineer of the United States Department of Agriculture.

The fall, he thinks, is a good time to look over houses and premises generally, because in many families preparations for winter include places where a fire danger exists. The heating system is overhauled, rubbish is cleared out of the cellar, and improvements such as electric wiring or insulation are considered. Out in the yard, trash is raked up and burned.

"Burning leaves and trash too near a house or wooden structure or clump of trees or shrubs is dangerous," Dr. Price points out. "Burn them on an open stretch of field or on an earth or gravel driveway at a distance from any inflammable materials. Don't let a bonfire burn after dark without watching.

"The fire underwirters say some of the worst home sources of fire are: Defective chimneys and flues; combustible roofs; gasoline, kerosene and similar combustible materials; matches and smoking; stoves, furnaces and heating apparatus; hot ashes and coals, including open fires; electricity and electrical appliances; lightning. Except the last, all of these can be controlled by reasonable precautions.

"For instance: A woman I know set her clothes on fire and got a bad burn on her arm from a pan of burning paraffin which boiled over on the stove and caught fire. Instead of smothering the flame with baking soda or a heavy rug, she tried to carry the pan out of the kitchen. Again, I know of several people who have burned their ironing boards and started fires in the laundry because they left the electric iron attached while they answered the telephone, and forgot to go back. It's a good rule to detach all electric appliances when leaving them, even for a minute or two.

"I heard of a man who used to shovel ashes out of the furnace onto the cellar floor, without even wetting them down. Often there were red-hot coals among them. As one might expect, the rest of the cellar was none too orderly. One day one of these hot coals rolled over into some newspapers and by the time water could be reached to put the fire out, there was a lively blaze and considerable damage had been done.

"Keep oily rags and paint soaked cloths in closed metal containers. Then if they do burst into flames the fire is controlled.

"I often hear of women who try to do some dry cleaning at home with gasoline, naphtha or benzene. One woman thought there was no source of fire in the kitchen, but she forgot the little pilot light on her gas range, and there was a bad explosion which wrecked the kitchen and nearly killed her. If dry cleaning must be done at home, carbon tetrachloride is safe and effective.

"Sad to say, people still start the wood or coal kitchen range with a dash of kerosene. Many of them do not live to tell what happened. Another dangerous practice is storing kerosene or gasoline in the house or cellar, or even in the garage."

Those are the comments of David J. Price on common sense precautions against fire in the home. Wallace Ashby of the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering advances some ideas on fire safety from the structural standpoint. He says this:

"With the present interest in using electricity more widely, I think you might warn your listeners about using proper wiring, not overloading their circuits, and conforming generally to the National Electrical Code when having current installed. Amateur electricians who try to extend or improve on the wiring are often responsible for bad fires starting from poor insulation or short circuits. Besides the danger of fire, anyone coming into contact with a defective piece of wiring may get a shock.

"Defective chimneys and flues are constantly causing fires. It is the business of the house owner to inspect the chimney at least once a year and repair it if necessary. Smoke pipes should never pass through floors, closets, or concealed locations of any sort. If it is necessary for a pipe to pass through a partition it should be properly protected with a ventilated or insulated metal thimble.

"Many cellar fires gain headway because the studding is unstopped at the level of the first floor. Fire stops of metal or other incombustible material, or blocks of wood, may be used. They should be fitted tightly to prevent fire or burning gases from entering the chimney-like spaces in the walls of a house.

"The roofing material is important, as you have learned from the list of the major causes of fires. In fact, the entire house should be considered from the fire safety standpoint and steps taken to make it safe if it is not."

While the engineers of the Bureaus of Chemistry and Soils and Agricultural Engineering are thinking of fires that occur in dwelling houses and other structures, the Forest Service is doing everything in its power to safeguard the National Forests from fire. During the past year some 4,000 transient camp workers have helped clear underbrush, make roads and trails, and establish lookouts in the National Forests. The Forest Service has an alert system of patrols by airplane, lookouts, and radio, through which fires are reported in their early stages. It has increased its fire fighting apparatus and the training of its personnel. But careless smokers and campers still throw away their burning cigarettes and matches, and leave camps without making sure that their fires are out.

If the people who use the forests for recreation will cooperate with the Forest Service by making sure that every match or cigarette or camp fire is dead out before they turn away from it, there will be far fewer fires due to carelessness. A good forest rule is "Always break your match in two before you throw it away."

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